

Diamond Bars 2 by David A. Romero: Book Review | Caroline Urbina

It's just like one bubble popping
In an infinite foam

David A. Romero

Having never visited Diamond Bar, California, reading David A. Romero's rendition of his life in his new book, *Diamond Bars 2*, gives the reader a glimpse into Romero's views on social justice, growing up in California, lyricism, and his struggles with alcohol. Starting off the book with "The 286", sets the scene of the typical California public transportation while giving perspective of Romero's Mexican American upbringing. When he states:

Of casual dining and the promise of Disneyland
Not too far in the distance
And where should this bus take me to
But a seemingly dead-end job in the same city.

David A. Romero

It hits a certain place in my heart as a Mexican American myself, he reflects on this image of the American dream for those who immigrate here to achieve this idea. Then the harsh reality that living here in America comes with its own hardships of needing to work these minuscule jobs— that don't typically lead to careers—in hopes of achieving this dream of visiting Disneyland. This poem is a segway into the brilliant unraveling story that takes place, in between, on and pouring from the pages of Romero's book.

The narrative that Romero is reflecting reminds me of Los Bros Hernandez, the fascinating storylines of people in his life that make it hard to want to put the book down. "The Redemption of Roxy Salgado" is the first poem in the string of narratives that prepares us for the heart-breaking stories that are to follow with "Bucky", "Sean" and "Jeremiah". Romero's ability to captivate his audience with

his story telling of the people he possibly has crossed paths within Diamond Bar, CA provides the city an animated soul. Comparatively, Los Bros Hernandez uses story lines that are somewhat fictional, but have some inspirational truth behind them. Romero gives us as the reader a similar suspenseful tone when reading these narratives. I would say specifically from the two brothers Gilbert Hernandez, with his Palomar stories, and Romero exhibits the same familiarity with imagery when telling the stories of his characters. He has been able to build up these narratives in such a way that makes it difficult to avert your attention away from the text.

In that same vein, I can appreciate that Romero is standing up for women's rights, because while reading "Batman Rides Shotgun with Barbie"—I will admit—it left me in awe to his commitment to social justice advocacy. The title alone made me laugh while not realizing it—when envisioning the image, it sparked a sense of joy to witness this kind of representation in poetry. It's such an evocative poem, that it should be distributed further with a younger audience especially now with the current U.S. political circumstances. A quick applause for this special moment in the poem,

To stop being such a chauvinist
It's time we stopped looking in the rearview
But instead
Towards the road ahead
I never liked Ken
He can ride in the backseat

David A. Romero

As much as I loved the Barbie Movie, Ken was indeed a problem, he ultimately did switch his attitude as soon as he learned he could have power as well by demeaning Barbie. This idea that Romero uses in this poem, brings up these ideas of social normative perspectives that women/girls face and the issues that need to change in this perception need to change. Coming back to Los Bros Hernandez, there is always discourse with Jaime Hernandez's character Maggie, because he is a man writing and drawing about a woman's life, but Jaime doesn't force her into fitting into the normative. Romero

is not trying to write about a woman's life in this book but instead advocating for women to become more empowered and to not settle for the passenger seat.

Romero's lyrical enthusiasm in "Say a Prayer for Me" ending the book makes this an amazing send off, leaving the exploration in the hands of the reader wondering *what world was I just in?* I know that's how I felt when I put the book down. The care and attention he placed into each poem made the reading experience so much sweeter and haunting.

I can relate to Romero when it comes to his struggles of being a poet in his poem "I Am the One Who Knocks" and being a Mexican American advocating for social justice. The twist of insanity that constantly attempting to push open opportunities for yourself and hopefully for others in the same situation, would make someone break like how Romero displays at the end of the poem. He uses these stunning images throughout the entire book that can make someone think *what he could possibly talk about next with a title like this?* The one poem that caught my attention to this was "Basketball with Edgar Allen Poe" where he uses himself playing basketball with Edgar Allen Poe as a metaphor for how even long after Poe's demise, he still manages to have such an impact on poets in the modern age.

Romero's book hits a special place in the heart for California natives and poets alike. This is a book to recommend to any reader who is interested in reading poetry that explores fascinating narratives, social justice, alluring images, and lyrical poems. He has sparked an interest in this poet, and I am curious to explore his work further in the future.